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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an investigation of the preferences of 50 parents of kindergarten children for various types of report cards and proposes a method of reporting that conforms to the parents' preferences. A general opinionnaire plus a Report Card Evaluation form were designed for the study. Parents were found to prefer (1) a reporting method that combined report cards, letters, and conferences, (2) information about the child's (a) work in relationship to ability, (b) performance on skills taught, and (c) academic development, and (3) a skills checklist. Because the Blennerhassett Elementary School in Wood County, West Virginia, was not using a report form consistent with parent's preferences, a new report card was developed and evaluated. Designed to be sent home every two months, the card incorporated a skills checklist, a teacher narrative, and a marking system showing student progress in skill areas. Reports about academic work were emphasized, though marks for social development, work habits, and physical development were included. Results of the report card evaluations suggest that the new format was successful in better meeting the needs of Blennerhassett parents. Limitations of the study and implications of the results are presented. The opinionnaire, report card evaluation questions, the Blennerhassett card and the new progress report are appended. (Author/RH)

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USING PARENTAL PREFERENCES IN REPORT CARDS TO DESIGN A REPORT CARD FOR BLENNERHASSETT KINDERGARTEN

by

Linda S. Stephens

A Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements of

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USING PARENTAL PREFERENCES IN REPORT CARDS
TO DESIGN A REPORT CARD FOR BLENNERHASSETT KINDERGARTEN

Introduction to the Problem

For many years, report cards have been used to inform parents of their children's performance in school. Report cards from as early as 1919 do not differ significantly from modern progress reports; both claim to be concerned with establishing communication between home and school.[1] Since these report cards should be designed to meet parents' needs for information, it is surprising that parents have so seldom been consulted about their preferences in progress reports.

Evidence is available which suggests that parents may not be entirely satisfied with existing reporting procedures. Articles with titles such as "How Report Cards can Harm Children and Mislead Parents"[2] and "The Dallas Monster"[3] appear in popular magazines in criticism of traditional report cards. Yet, despite parents' apparent dissatisfaction with report cards, little research can be found concerning how parents do prefer to be informed about their children's progress in school.

Alternative methods of reporting have been described which could be used to combat the parents' dissatisfaction with traditional report cards. D.J. Walling lists five ways of reporting to parents: (1) traditional A-B-C-D-F grades, (2) numerical ratings, (3) skills checklists, (4) narratives, and (5) conferences.[4] Sapone and Giuliano suggest a similar list, adding learning contracts, personalized letters, and happygrams to the list of alternatives.[5] Wise and Newman suggest group-, self-, and task-referenced standards of evaluation, and coded, narrative, or computer formats for reporting.[6] However, although these authors recommend alternatives in reporting pupil progress to

parents, none presented evidence concerning which of the proposed alternative reporting methods parents prefer.

Very little research is available concerning parental preferences in report cards. Only two studies have been located which attempt to determine parents' report card needs. The first, a 1973 study by Ryan and Ryan, involved questionning the parents of students in a special education class to determine which standard of evaluation and which format of report they preferred.[7] The second study, published by Jack Cassidy in 1977, dealt with reporting pupil progress in reading, and contrasted the needs of parents with the needs of teachers.[8] Both studies recognized the importance of considering parents' needs in designing reporting procedures. No comparable study of parents' preferences in report cards is available for the field of early childhood education.

Despite the lack of research about parents' needs and preferences in kindergarten report cards, the first report card a child receives in kindergarten may be the most important one. Since kindergarten is usually the first contact parents have with school, the initial kindergarten report card may open or restrict future lines of communication between home and school. Also, as Carl C. Fehrle suggests in a 1979 article, "of all the delicate situations that can arise among those initial experiences with the schools, receiving that very first report card could be the most sensitive."[9] Fehrle suggests that the first report card may be the first judgment of the child made outside the family and may be interpreted by the parents as a judgment of how well they prepared the child for school. Finally, the kindergarten report card is uniquely important because it provides a baseline upon which the child's future school performance may be evaluated. Lasting

positive or negative expectations of school success may be conveyed by that first kindergarten report card. Thus, the kindergarten report card is uniquely important in laying the foundation for positive parent-school relations.

In summary, report cards should be designed to effectively communicate with parents; however, evidence suggests that parents are not satisfied with some current reporting procedures. Although alternative methods of reporting are available which might better meet the parents' needs, very little research is available concerning how parents do prefer to be informed about their children's progress in school. Although kindergarten report cards are especially important to parents, little has been done to assess parents' preferences in kindergarten report cards. Therefore, the problem addressed in this study is a significant one: to assess parents' preferences in kindergarten report cards and to design a method of reporting to meet those needs. This problem can be restated as a hypothesis to be tested: By assessing parents' opinions about kindergarten report cards, a report card can be designed which better meets their needs.

Method

Introduction to Methodology

The methodology described in this section was designed to test the hypothesis that "by assessing parents' opinions about kindergarten report cards, a report card can be designed which better meets their needs." In overview, an opinionnaire was designed to determine the report card preferences of a specific population of parents. The collected data were analyzed and a new report card was designed in light of the parents' expressed opinions. Evaluating the previously used report card and the newly designed progress report on the same five-point scale made it possible to compare the two reporting methods. In this manner, the ability of the new report card design to better meet the needs of parents was assessed.

Population

The setting for this study was Blennerhassett Elementary School, a public school located in Wood County, West Virginia. Fifty parents whose children were enrolled in Blennerhassett kindergarten during the 1979-1980 school year were contacted for the study. This group represented almost the entire population of Blennerhassett kindergarten parents, since less than sixty children had been enrolled in kindergarten during 1979-80. Because the population was limited, no attempt was made to generalize the results of this study to groups other than the target population; the study must be repeated to determine the needs of other parents.

Materials

The project began by sending requests for copies of kindergarten report card to twenty-five school systems randomly selected from throughout the United States. A letter explaining the nature of the study and a self-addressed, stamped envelope accompanied each request. Responses were received

from nineteen of the twenty-five systems, and these report cards were retained for use as primary source material in this study.

Also, two data-collecting forms were designed for this study to obtain the Blennerhassett parents' opinions about kindergarten report cards. Items for the opinionnaires were designed from information revealed in articles about report card design[10] and from the primary source report cards received from throughout the united states.

First, a general opinionnaire was constructed to determine the parents' preferences in report cards. This Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire, contained in Appendix 1, consisted of five questions designed to measure parents' opinions about five major characteristics of progress reporting in general. The characteristics assessed included methods of reporting, frequency of reports, standards of evaluation, format of reports, and information reported. Each question listed four alternative responses, and parents were asked to rank the responses in order of their preference. The closed form of questionnaire was chosen to facilitate tallying responses; however, an other category was included to solicit parents' original comments. The opinionnaire questions were refined by a process of field-testing on a population of parents and teachers to determine their readability and thoroughness.

The second data collecting form was a Report Card Evaluation designed to measure parents' opinions about specific report cards. This Report Card Evaluation contained in Appendix II, was a Likert-type opinionnaire which consisted of eight statements about various aspects of the report card, including its overall value, frequency, format, standard of evaluation, and information presented. As recommended in Likert procedures, both positive and negative statements were included on the form to prevent a response set

from occurring. Parents were asked to indicate their agreement with each statement on a five-point scale: (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) undecided, (d) disagree, and (e) strongly disagree. As with the initial opinionnaire, the evaluation was field tested for readability. This Likert scale was used to evaluate both the report card issued during 1979-80 and the new report card designed in this study. The resulting scores were used to compare the parents' opinions about the two report cards and thus to judge the efectiveness of the new report card design.

Design

The study began by making initial contact with the fifty parents by phone to determine their willingness to participate in the project. All fifty of the Blennerhassett parents initially contacted agreed to participate.

After obtaining this verbal agreement to cooperate, initial opinion-gathering materials were mailed to the parents. These materials consisted of a cover letter restating the nature of the study and a copy of the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire to assess the parents' opinion about report cards in general. To assess the parents' opinions about the specific report card used the previous year, a copy of the Report Card Evaluation and a sample of last year's report card for reference were also included. Of course, a self-addressed stamped return envelope was included to facilitate the prompt return of the materials to the researcher.

To test the reliability of these data gathering materials, phone call interviews were randomly conducted with one-tenth of the parents. In each case, the verbal responses upheld the written responses to the questionnaire. Thus, the instruments were judged to be adequately reliable.

After the majority of parents had responded to the Kindergarten

Report Card Opinionnaire, the data were tallied and analyzed as described in the following section. The resulting opinions, discussed later, were used as the basis for designing a new report card. The report cards collected from throughout the United States along with the articles about report card design[11] served as primary source materials to aide in the design of the new report form.

After the new report card was designed to better meet the needs parents expressed on the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire, it was mailed to the forty-six parents who responded to the initial survey. Accompanying the new report card was a cover letter asking the parents to rate the new card using the same Report Card Evaluation five-point scale they previously used to evaluate the 1979-1980 report card. The Likert scores of the new report card were compared to the scores of the 1979-1980 card, and the results are discussed in the Results section. Thus, a measure of the new report card's ability to better meet the parents' needs was obtained.

Data Collection and Analysis

As initial data collection materials were received from the parents, responses to each item on the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire and the Report Card Evaluation were recorded onto tally sheets. The tally sheet of raw data for the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire recorded the rank each parent gave to response a, b, c, and d for each question. Because an insignigicant number of e, other responses occurred, those responses were not included in Table 1. Table 1 presents the raw data obtained from the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire.

TABLE 1

Raw Data Tally of the Responses of 45 Parents
to the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire

Question	Responses	Ranks Assigned by Parents 1st	2nd	3rd	4th	not ranked
1. Methods of Reporting	a. Informal letters	5	16	6	17	1
	b. Report cards	5	12	11	13	4
	c. Conferences	1	20	15	4	5
	d. Combination of a,b, and c	33	1	7	3	1
2. Frequency of Reports	a. Each month	4	17	5	13	6
	b. Every 2 months	27	11	6	0	1
	c. Three times per year	11	16	16	0	2
	d. Two times per year	3	5	8	22	7
3. Standards of Evaluation	a. Group-referenced	6	7	19	7	6
	b. Progress-referenced	4	4	3	29	5
	c. Ability-referenced	19	18	5	2	1
	d. Skills-referenced	14	17	11	1	2
4. Format of Report	a. Teacher narrative	7	13	10	9	6
	b. Computer assisted report printout	7	8	10	13	7
	c. Child-marked report form	7	9	15	11	3
	d. Skills checklist	22	12	3	4	4
5. Information Reported	a. Physical development	0	3	9	25	8
	b. Social development	9	7	16	8	5
	d. Work habits	8	21	8	1	7
	e. Academic skills	24	10	3	2	6

Analysis of the raw data presented in Table 1 does provide a limited amount of information. For example, it reveals that Question 1, response d, received a large number of first place rankings. Similarly, it reveals that Question 5, response a, received a large number of fourth place rankings. However, the raw data was not as informative in clarifying the preferences between some other responses. For example, from the information presented in Table 1, it is difficult to determine whether Question 1, response a or response b was the most preferred response.

Therefore, to facilitate comparison between the responses and to reveal the order of parents' preference, a weighted point system was devised. Points were assigned as follows: each first place ranking received 4 points, each second place received 3 points, each third place received 2 points, and each fourth place received 1 point. Because a significant number of respondents (seven out of forty-five) only ranked their first and second choices in some questions, the unranked third and fourth choices were each assigned a value of 1.5 points. Calculations were then performed to determine an average point score for each response. To clarify this procedure, sample calculations for Question 1, response a, may be found in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Sample Calculations to Assign an Average Point Score to the Raw Data from Question 1, Response a of the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire

Rank	Assigned Point Value	x	Number of Responses	=	Point Score
1st	4	x	5	=	20
2nd	3	x	16	=	48
3rd	2	x	6	=	12
3rd or 4th	1.5	x	1	=	1.5
4th	1	x	17	=	17
			Total point score:		98.5

TABLE 2, continued

Total Point Score	Number of Responses	=	Average Point Score
98.5	45	=	2.19

The calculations in Table 2 represent a three-step process. First, appropriate point values were assigned to yield a point score for each ranking. The point scores for each ranking were added to yield a total point score. Finally the total point score was divided by the number of respondents to yield an average point score for response a. These calculations were repeated for each of the four responses in each of the five questions on the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire. In this manner, point values were assigned to each response to permit ease of comaprison between responses. The calculated average point values and the resulting ranking of responses to the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire are presented in Table 6 in the Results section.

The tally sheets for the two Likert scale Report Card Evaluations were less complicated to score because ranking within each response was not involved. Table 3 and Table 4 present the raw data collected on the Report Card Evaluations. Trial 1 (Table 3) represents the evaluation of the 1979-1980 report card; trial 2 (Table 4) represents the evaluation of the newly designed report card.

TABLE 3

Raw Data Tally of Responses of 46 Parents
to the Report Card Evaluation, Trial 1

Statement	Response a	b	c	d	e
1	5	24	7	8	2
2	31	10	1	2	2
3	3	11	2	22	8
4	2	13	5	19	7
5	3	3	0	24	16
6	8	22	4	9	3
7	2	18	5	11	10
8	5	13	5	19	4

TABLE 4

Raw Data Tally of Responses of 40 Parents
to the Report Card Evaluation, Trial 2

Statement	Response a	b	c	d	e
1	25	15	0	0	0
2	2	2	1	23	12
3	1	0	0	18	21
4	1	1	0	24	14
5	2	7	8	20	3
6	14	25	1	0	0
7	11	27	2	0	0
8	1	2	2	22	13

The raw data resulting from the Report Card Evaluations, presented in Tables 3 and 4, were analyzed according to the usual procedure for five-point Likert scales. First, following the usual procedure for Likert scales, point values were assigned to each response. For statements 1, 5, 6, and 7 which expressed favorable opinions about the report card, points were assigned as follows: a= 5 points, b= 4 points, c= 3 points, d= 2 points, and e= 1 point. For statements 2, 3, 4, and 8 which reflect negative opinions about the report card, the point values were reversed: a= 1 point, b= 2 points, c= 3 points, d= 4 points, and e= 5 points. The next step involved multiplying the number of a, b, c, d, and e responses by their appropriate point values and adding the products to yield a total point score for each statement. Because different numbers of responses were received in Trial 1 (46 out of 50) and in Trial 2 (40 out of 46), the point values were then divided by the number of responses to yield an average point score. By calculating average point scores, the results of Trial 1 and Trial 2 could be compared. To clarify this procedure, Table 5 illustrates a sample calculation of the average point score for Question 1, Trial 1.

TABLE 5

Sample Calculations to Assign an Average Point Score to Data for Question 1, Trial 1 of the Report Card Evaluation

Response	Assigned Point Value	x	Number of Responses	=	Point Score
a	5	x	5	=	25
b	4	x	24	=	96
c	3	x	7	=	21
d	2	x	8	=	16
e	1	x	2		2
			Total Point Score		160

Total Point Score ÷ Number of Responses = Average Point Score

160 ÷ 46 = 3.48

Calculations such as those illustrated in Table 5 were repeated to assign average point values to each statement on the Report Card Evaluation, Trials 1 and 2. An overall score for Trial 1 was obtained by adding the scores of the individual statements and dividing by eight. In a similar manner, an overall score was calculated for Trial 2. Thus, scores from Trial 1 and Trial 2 could be compared to determine if the new report card design of Trial 2 was ranked more favorably by the parents. Table 7, presented in the Results section, lists the Report Card Evaluation statements and compares the point scores for both the old and the new report cards.

Results

Introduction

The data collected in this study revealed much interesting information related to the hypothesis that "by assessing parents' opinions about kindergarten report cards, a report card can be designed which better meets their needs." First, analysis of parents' responses to the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire and the resulting ranking of the parents' preferences in report cards are discussed in this section. Also, the Results section describes how these parents' opinions were used to design a new report card more appropriate for the needs of the Blennerhassett parents. Finally, the Results section concludes by presenting the parents' evaluations of the old and the new report cards on the same five-point scale. Based on these results, a discussion of the effectiveness of the new report card design is presented in the following Discussion section.

Results of the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire

Analysis of the parents' responses to the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire revealed in Table 6 presents the characteristics of report cards examined and the parents' rankings of their importance. Responses are listed in the order parents ranked them, based on the weighted point scores computed in the Data Analysis section.

TABLE 6

Responses to the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire
Listed in the Order of Parents' Preference
Indicated by the Calculated Point Scores

Question 1: Methods of Reporting

3.41 points	(1) Combination of letters, report cards and conferences
3.18 points	(2) Parent-teacher conferences
2.19 points	(3) Informal letters
2.16 points	(4) Formal report cards

Question 2: Frequency of Reports

3.43 points	(1) Every 2 months
2.82 points	(2) 3 times per year
2.20 points	(3) Each month
1.68 points	(4) Two times per year

Question 3: Standards of Evaluation

3.23 points	(1) Ability-referenced (working up to ability)
2.99 points	(2) Skills-referenced (performance on skills taught)
2.21 points	(3) Group-referenced (compared with classmates)
1.57 points	(4) Progress-referenced (progress since last report)

Question 4: Format of Report

3.23 points	(1) Skills checklist
2.37 points	(2) Teacher narrative
2.25 points	(3) Child-marked report form
2.15 points	(4) Computer printout

Question 5: Information Reported

3.34 points	(1) Academic Skills
2.84 points	(2) Work Habits
2.40 points	(3) Social Adjustment
1.41 points	(4) Physical Development

The responses to the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire reported in Table 6 indicate the characteristics which the Blennerhassett parents preferred in kindergarten report cards. First, the method of reporting preferred most often was a combination of report cards, letters, and conferences. Responses to Question 2 about report card frequency revealed that the parents

preferred report cards to be issued every two months. Question 3 about standards of evaluation revealed a preference for information about the child's work in relation to his ability. However, information about the child's performance on skills taught was also ranked as a highly preferred characteristic. The fourth question revealed one of the most clear preferences; the skills checklist was the most favored format of reporting. Finally, responses to Question 5 revealed a preference for receiving information about the child's academic development.

Based on these opinions expressed by the parents, the appropriateness of the report card used at Blennerhassett was evaluated. The 1979-80 Blennerhassett kindergarten report card, contained in Appendix 3, was a Computer Assisted Report Printout, similar to the CARP program advocated by Duane Giannangelo.[12] Basically, the computer printout described pupil progress with specific skills in the areas of Language Arts, Math, Social Science, Health and Physical Education, and Social Growth. Qualifying statements such as "is making satisfactory progress", "needs to make further improvement". "is showing improvement", and "needs to practice at home" were used to describe pupil progress with specific skills. Skills statements varied according to the skills an individual child worked on during the reporting period. This report card was issued twice per year in combination with parent-teacher conferences. This Computer Assisted Report format had been selected for use by the Blennerhassett teachers because it was efficient, simple to administer, and it provided an individualized report for each child.

The fact that the report card was used in conjunction with other reporting methods (conferences and letters) was consistent with the preferences of Blennerhassett parents. However, when evaluated in light of some of the

the other opinions expressed by the parents, the Computer Assisted Report Card was found to be seriously lacking. First, the report card was only issued twice during the year, which was clearly not often enough according to the parents' opinions expressed on the opinionnaire. Furthermore, the opinionnaire revealed the computer assisted report printout to be the parents' least favored format of reporting. Therefore, because the results of the opinionnaire revealed areas in which the computer assisted report printout used in 1970-1980 was not meeting the needs of the Blennerhassett kindergarten parents, a new report card was designed to attempt to improve the reporting procedure for parents.

Design of the New Report Card

Considering the parents' opinions revealed in Table 6 about the preferred frequency, format, standards of evaluation, and content of a report card, the new report card presented in Appendix 4 was designed. First, because the parents indicated a preferred frequency of issuing a report card every two months, the new report card was designed to be sent home in October, December, February, April, and June (every two months). Second, a skills checklist, indicated on the questionnaire to be the most favored format of report card, was selected as the format of the new report card. Skill statements for the checklist were drawn from the report cards collected earlier as primary source material. Also, an element of the second most favored format, the teacher narrative, was included on the new report form. Third, because parents were interested in ability- as well as skills-referenced standards of evaluation, a marking system was devised to show how well the child was progressing with each skill on the checklist. The marking

system for the new report card included marks for "skill mastered", "making satisfactory progress", "needs to make further improvement", and "not yet taught". The "making satisfactory progress" and "needs to make further improvement" categories were designed to give some indication to the parents about the child's ability. Also, the teacher narrative section of the new report card could be used to discuss whether the child was working to his full potential. These evaluative standards were designed on the basis of information from the articles about report card design cited earlier. Finally, because information about academic skills was revealed to be the most important to parents, the majority of space on the new report card was devoted to reporting about academic work. Because parents did reveal an interest in the other areas of social development, work habits, and physical development, some information about those areas was also included on the report card. The teachers' concern for efficiency and ease of administration were also considered in designing this report form.

Evaluation of the New Report Card's Effectiveness

After designing the new report card based on the parents' opinions, it was submitted to the parents for evaluation. The same Likert scale used to evaluate the 1979-1980 computer assisted report printout was used to evaluate the new design. The eight Likert scale statements were designed to measure parents' opinions about specific aspects of the report cards. Averaging the scores of the specific statements yielded an overall point score for the old computer assisted report form and for the newly designed skills checklist. These specific and overall scores are revealed in Table 7.

In reading Table 7, it is important to note that the phrasing of the statements from the Report Card Evaluation form has been slightly altered so

that each statement now presents a positive opinion about the report card. This change in phrasing was necessary to reflect the fact that the point values were reversed when calculating the scores for the negatively phrased items on the opinionnaire. By this change, the statements were made to positively correspond with their numerical scores; the higher the score, the more favorable the parents' evaluation.

Table 7, which follows, lists the statements from the Report Card Evaluation and the calculated average point scores for the 1970-1980 report card (Trial 1) and for the newly designed report card (Trial 2). Conclusions about the effectiveness of the new report card drawn from the results presented in Table 7 are discussed in the following Discussion section.

TABLE 7

Average Point Scores of Trial 1 and Trial 2
of the Report Card Evaluation

Report Card Evaluation Statement	Trial 1 Computer Assisted Report	Trial 2 Skills Checklist	Change
1. This report card helps me to better understand my child's performance in school	3.48	4.63	+ 1.15
2. This report card is issued often enough to keep me informed of my child's progress.	1.56	4.03	+ 2.47
3. The information presented on this report card is clear and easy to understand.	3.46	4.45	+ .99
4. This report card lets me know if my child is having problems in school so that I can help him.	3.35	4.23	+ .88
5. This report card lets me know how well my child is doing compared to the other children in his class.	1.98	2.63	+ .65
6. I can tell how well my child is learning specific academic skills by reading this report card.	3.50	4.33	+ .83
7. If my child were misbehaving in school, this report card would show it.	2.80	4.23	+ 1.43
8. This report card tells me exactly what skills were taught during this reporting period.	3.09	4.10	+ 1.01
OVERALL AVERAGE SCORE	2.88	4.08	+ 1.20

Discussion

Conclusions

This project attempted to prove the hypothesis that "by assessing parents' opinions about kindergarten report cards, a report card can be designed which better meets their needs." Conclusions about the effectiveness of the study can be drawn from two sources: the initial assessment of parents' opinions, and the design and evaluation of the resulting report card.

First, many of the results of the general assessment of parents' preferences in report cards were previously discussed in describing the rationale for designing the new report card. One other interesting result of the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire was that parents ranked report cards alone as their least favored reporting method. However, in combination with conferences and letters, report cards were judged to be the most favored method of learning about their children's progress. Thus, in order to be most effective in meeting parents' needs, report cards must be supplemented with other methods of progress reporting. Both the original computer assisted report printout and the newly designed skills checklist report cards were used in such a combined reporting approach.

Second, the results of the Report Card Evaluations presented in Table 7 suggest that the new report card was indeed successful in better meeting the needs of the Blennerhassett parents. Comparing the parents' evaluations of the old and the new report cards on the same five-point scale reveals several interesting conclusions. First, the overall score of 4.08 received by the new skills checklist was significantly higher (1.20 points) than the overall score of 2.88 for the original computer assisted report.

In addition to a higher overall score, analysis of the individual statement scores reveals that the parents considered the new report card to be more favorable in every aspect evaluated. The most improvement (2.47 points) was seen in the rating of the report card's frequency (Statement 2); the twice-yearly report card received a very low score of 1.56, whereas the newly designed bimonthly report received a significantly higher score of 4.03. Another area of significant improvement (1.45 points) is revealed in the responses to Statement 7 about the report card's ability to report social behavior.

The lowest score received by the new report card (Statement 5, 2.63 points) reflected its ability to compare a child's progress to the progress of his classmates. Although the new report card was ranked higher than the old (change of + .65 points) in this aspect, both received fairly low scores. However, these low scores do not necessarily reflect a shortcoming of these report cards, because parents' responses to the initial opinionnaire presented in Table 6 revealed that such group-referenced standards of evaluation were not very important to them.

Other results of comparing the Report Card Evaluations from Trial 1 and Trial 2 revealed that the new report card was considered less confusing (Statement 3) and more informative (Statements 4, 6, and 8) by the parents. Also, parents ranked the new report card 1.15 points higher than the old in its ability to help them understand their child's progress in school.

From this discussion of the results, it is obvious that the study was successful in proving the hypothsis that "by assessing parents' opinions about kindergarten report cards, a report card can be designed which better

meets their needs. However, this conclusion needs to be evaluated in light of several limitations of the study.

Limitations

First, as stated from the beginning, the population in this study was limited. Therefore, no attempt is made to generalize the appropriateness of the new skills checklist report card design for other parents. Rather, it would be necessary to repeat the opinion-gathering procedure and corresponding analysis to determine the type of report card appropriate for other populations.

A second limitation of the study results from the use of weighted scores on the Likert scale. All Likert scales are subject to the limitations of trying to assign a numerical score to an opinion. First, the intervals between responses (a) strongly agree and (b) agree are not likely to be equal for all people. Also, different combinations of positions can yield equal scores without necessarily representing the same opinion. This limitation was also true for the weighted point values assigned to rank the opinions on the Kindergarten Report Card Opinionnaire. However, tables of raw data were included in the text and could be used to clarify the calculated scores if necessary. Moreover, despite these limitations of all such scales, they are generally accepted as useful research tools.

Third, the study is subject to the limitations inherent in all opinion research. Although anonymous response forms were used to encourage respondents to state their own opinions, there is always a concern in opinion measurement that individuals may answer according to their perceptions of what should be rather than of what is. If this were true, the parents may have ranked the newly designed report card more favorably than the old one

because they though they should. Separate mailings of the Report Card Evaluations for the old and new report cards was done to lessen the parents' ability to consciously mark the new report card more favorably on the basis of a sense of duty alone.

Fourth, the study is limited because the newly designed report card did not meet the needs of all of the parents involved. Responses to the opinionnaires revealed some deviation in opinions, and the resulting report card was designed to meet the needs of the majority of parents. This study did not attempt to design individualized reporting methods to meet the needs of each parent; only the opinion of the majority was considered.

Finally, the study may have been limited because parents were overly critical of the report card used the previous year. Perhaps if the new report card had been used and then evaluated, problems in its workability might have been revealed. Thus, the new report card design was evaluated hypothetically, which might have encouraged more favorable responses.

In conclusion, despite the limitations, the study did reach a resolution of the hypothsis. The high percentage of responses to the survey materials, 92% on Trial 1 (46 out of 50) and 87% on Trial 2 (40 out of 46), allowed significant conclusions to be formulated about the opinions of the parents surveyed. Also, the high percentage of parents responding indicated that the study of their children's report card forms was of interest to them. Based on the information presented herein, it is possible to conclude that, "by assessing parents' opinions about report cards, a kindergarten report card can be designed which better meets their needs".

Implications

Several issues raised in this study of parents' preferences in kindergarten report cards suggest areas for further study. First, because this study was successful in designing a report card to meet the needs of a specific population of parents, it would be interesting to repeat this type of research with different populations of parents. Similarities between groups could then be compared to reveal any common opinions held by parents about report cards.

Second, two implications for specific educational action resulted from this study. First, because of the favorable response of the parents to the newly designed skills checklist report card, it would be interesting to adopt that new report card for use in kindergarten. The workability of the progress report could be tested and parents' opinions about it could be re-examined after a year in use.

A second implication for educational action can be drawn from the success of the study. Because the limited population involved does not allow generalization of the results to other parents, parents' preferences in reporting should be assessed at the beginning of each year. Based on their opinions, an attempt should be made to use a reporting procedure specifically designed to meet the needs of those parents.

Overall, the success of this project should encourage other educators to consider parents' opinions when designing reporting forms. Consideration of parents' preferences should improve the communication process between home and school.

Summary

Kindergarten report cards offer a unique opportunity to establish positive relations between home and school. However, little research is available about parents' preferences in kindergarten report cards. This study attempted to prove the hypothesis that "by assessing parents' opinions about kindergarten report cards, a report card can be designed which better meets their needs".

The design of the study involved devising an opinionnaire to assess the preferences of Blennerhassett school parents in kindergarten report cards. Results of the opinionnaire revealed that the parents preferred a combination of report cards, conferences, and letters to report their child's progress, with report cards issued every two months. Information about the child's progress with skills as well as information about his work in relation to his ability were both revealed to be important to parents. Finally, a skills checklist was selected as the preferred format of a report card, with an emphasis on reporting information about academic development.

Based on the information revealed by the opinionnaire, a new report card was designed to better meet the needs expressed by the parents. When the parents rated the previous year's report card and the newly designed progress report on the same five-point scale, the new report card was judged to be superior in overall value, format, frequency, information presented, and evaluation standards.

Thus, the hypothesis that "by assessing parents' opinions about kindergarten report cards, a report card can be designed which better meets their needs" was supported. Asking parents how they prefer to be informed about their child's progress in kindergarten is a reasonable, effective way to begin a good system of communication between home and school. In this

way, parents and teachers can work together to provide the best possible education for the child.

Endnotes

[1]Blanche A. Cheney, "The Lawrence Plan for Education in Citizenship: The New Basis for Rating Children," Journal of Educational Method 2 (8): 338, April 1923. As cited by Donovan J. Walling, "Designing a Report Card That Communicates," Educational Leadership 32 (4): 259 (January, 1975).

[2]Arlene Silberman, "How Report Cards Can Harm Children and Mislead Parents", Ladies' Home Journal 89 (3): 72-77+ (March, 1972).

[3]"The Dallas Monster," Time 103:59 (February 18, 1974).

[4]Donovan J. Walling, "Designing a Report Card that Communicates," Educational Leadership 32 (4): 258-60 (January, 1975).

[5]Carmelo V. Sapone and Joseph R. Giuliano, "Alternative Methods of Reporting Pupil Progress," NASSP Bulletin 61 (405): 44-46 (January, 1977).

[6]Robert I. Wise and Betty Newman, "The Responsibilities of Grading," Educational Leadership 32 (4): 253 (January 1975).

[7]Susanne Blough Ryan and Richard E. Ryan, "Report Cards? Why Not Ask the Parents?" Teaching Exceptional Children (Fall, 1973).

[8]Jack Cassidy, "Reporting Pupil Progress in Reading--Parents vs. Teachers," The Reading Teacher 31: 294-6. (December, 1977).

[9]Carl C. Fehrle, "Here're Seven Things Your Kindergarten Report Card Should Measure," Executive Educator 1 (11):19 (November, 1979).

[10]Books and Articles used in this study to design the opinionnaires and the new report card include:

(1)John W. Best, Research in Education (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), pp. 156-175.

(2) Norman M. Chansky, "A Critical Examination of School Report Cards from K through 12," Reading Improvement 12 (3): 184-192 (Fall 1975).

(3) Carl C. Fehrle, cited above.

(4) David A. Frisbie, "Expanded Reporting Forms: Points to Ponder," The Clearing House 49 (8): 371-2 (April 1976).

(5) A.N. Oppenheim, Questionnaire Design and Attitude Measurement (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966).

(6) "Reporting Pupil Progress to Parents," NEA Research Bulletin 29 (3): 81-2 (October, 1971).

[11]Ibid.

[12]Duane M. Giannangelo, "Make Report Cards Meaningful," The Educational Forum 39 (4): 409 -15 (May 1975).

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BEST, JOHN W. Research in Education. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1977.

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CHANSKY, NORMAN M. "A Critical Examination of School Report Cards from K through 12." Reading Improvement 12: 184-192 (Fall, 1975).

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RYAN, SUSAN BLOUGH and RICHARD E. RYAN. "Report Cards: Why Not Ask the Parents?" Teaching Exceptional Children (Fall 1973).

SAPONE, CARMELO V. and JOSEPH R. GIULIANO. "Alternative Methods of Reporting Pupil Progress." NASSP Bulletin 61: 44-46 (January, 1977).

SILBERMAN, ARLENE. "How Report Cards Can Harm Children and Mislead Parents." Ladies' Home Journal 89: 72-77+ (March, 1972).

"THE DALLAS MONSTER." Time 103: 59 (February 18, 1974).

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WISE, ROBERT I. and BETTY NEWMAN. "The Responsibilities of Grading." Educational Leadership 32: 253 (January, 1975).

KINDERGARTEN REPORT CARD OPINIONNAIRE

1. How would you prefer to be informed of your child's progress in kindergarten? Please put a 1 beside the method that is your first choice, a 2 beside your next choice, and so on.

   I would prefer:

   _____ Informal letters sent home by the teacher as needs arise.

   _____ Formal report cards sent home throughout the year.

   _____ Parent-teacher conferences scheduled throughout the year.

   _____ A combination of letters, report cards, and conferences.

   _____ Other. (Please specify:_____)

2. How often do you think a written report card should be sent home in kindergarten? Please put a 1 beside your first choice, a 2 beside your second choice, and so on.

   A report card should be sent home:

   _____ Each month.

   _____ Every two months.

   _____ Three times per year.

   _____ Two times per year.

   _____ Other. (Please specify:_____)

3. Which information about your child's progress do you think is most important for a report card to give? Please put a 1 by your first choice, a 2 by your next choice, and so on.

   I would most like to know:

   _____ How much progress my child has made since the last report.

   _____ How my child is doing compared to the other children in his class.

   _____ If my child is working up to his ability.

   _____ How my child is performing on the skills worked on in class.

   _____ Other. (Please specify:_____)

OVER

4. Which format of report card best meets your needs as a parent learning about your child's progress in school? Please put a 1 by your first choice, a 2 by your next choice, and so on.

It would be easiest to learn about my child's progress from:

_____ A narrative report written by the teacher informing me of my child's progress.

_____ An individualized computer printout stating my child's general progress in school as well as his progress with specific skills that have been taught.

_____ A report form which allows my child to check off skills as he learns them, marking his own progress. (For example, my child could color in a picture of a shoe when he learns to tie his shoes.)

_____ A checklist of specific skills to be taught in kindergarten which the teacher checks off as my child progresses through the program, showing me my child's progress.

_____ Other. (Please specify:_____)

5. Which areas of your child's progress do you think are most important on a report card? Please put a 1 beside the item that is most important, a 2 beside the next most important, and so on.

I most want to know about my child's:

_____ Physical development (how well my child's coordination is developing).

_____ Social adjustment (how well my child gets along with others and follows school rules).

_____ Work habits (if my child is working as hard as he should in school).

_____ Academic skills (how my child is progressing with learning letters, numbers, and other skills).

_____ Other. (Please specify:_____)

Appendix 2

REPORT CARD EVALUATION

The following statements represent opinions about the report card we used in kindergarten this year. A sample is attached to remind you of the report card's format. Please circle the letter beside each statement that indicates how you agree with that statement. Please indicate what you believe, rather than what you think you should believe.

a. I strongly agree
b. I agree
c. I am undecided
d. I disagree
e. I strongly disagree

a b c d e 1. This report card helps me to better understand my child's performance in school.

a b c d e 2. This report card is not issued often enough (every two months) (twice per year) to keep me informed of my child's progress.

a b c d e 3. The information presented on this report card is confusing and difficult to understand.

a b c d e 4. This report card does not let me know if my child is having any problems in school so that I can help him.

a b c d e 5. This report card lets me know how well my child is doing compared to the other children in his class.

a b c d e 6. I can tell how well my child is learning specific academic skills by reading this report card.

a b c d e 7. If my child were misbehaving in school, this report card would show it.

a b c d e 8. This report card does not tell me exactly what skills were taught during this reporting period.

Appendix 3

1979-80 Blennerhassett Report Card

REPORT CARD FOR ELEMENTARY GRADES K-6

SECOND NINE WEEKS 1979-1980

PLEASE KEEP THIS COPY

PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN ENVELOPE

DEAR PARENTS,

A REPORT CARD SERVES AS ONLY ONE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE PARENTS AND SCHOOL. THE INFORMATION IN THIS REPORT IS GIVEN WITH A SINCERE DESIRE TO PROMOTE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND HOME. IN ORDER TO HELP EACH CHILD LEARN AT A RATE APPROPRIATE FOR HIS LEVEL OF MATURITY AND ABILITY, SCHOOL AND HOME MUST WORK TOGETHER. WHEN YOU HAVE QUESTIONS CONCERNING THIS REPORT, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO TALK WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER OR PRINCIPAL.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

NAME
GRADE
SCHOOL
TEACHER
PRINCIPAL

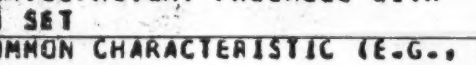
ATTENDANCE RECORD	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH	TOTAL
DAYS PRESENT	.0	80.0			80.0
DAYS ABSENT-EXCUSED	.0	7.0			7.0
DAYS ABSENT-UNEXCUSED	.0	.0			.0
TIMES TARDY	.0	.0			.0

GENERAL INFORMATION

		SELDOM	USUALLY	CONSISTENTLY
WORKS WELL:	INDEPENDENTLY		✓	
	IN GROUP		✓	
	WITH ENTIRE CLASS		✓	
LISTENS:			✓	
FOLLOWS DIRECTIONS:	ORAL		✓	
	WRITTEN			
COMPLETES WORK ON TIME			✓	
OBSERVES SCHOOL RULES	0.0		✓	
RESPECTS RIGHTS OF OTHERS				✓
ACCEPTS TEACHER GUIDANCE IN:	SELF-DIRECTION			✓
ACCEPTS RESPONSIBILITY FOR:	POSSESSIONS			✓
	BEHAVIOR			✓
HAS FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD:	SELF		✓	
	OTHERS			✓
	LEARNING		✓	

TEACHER STATEMENTS 002 9213912 PERIOD 2

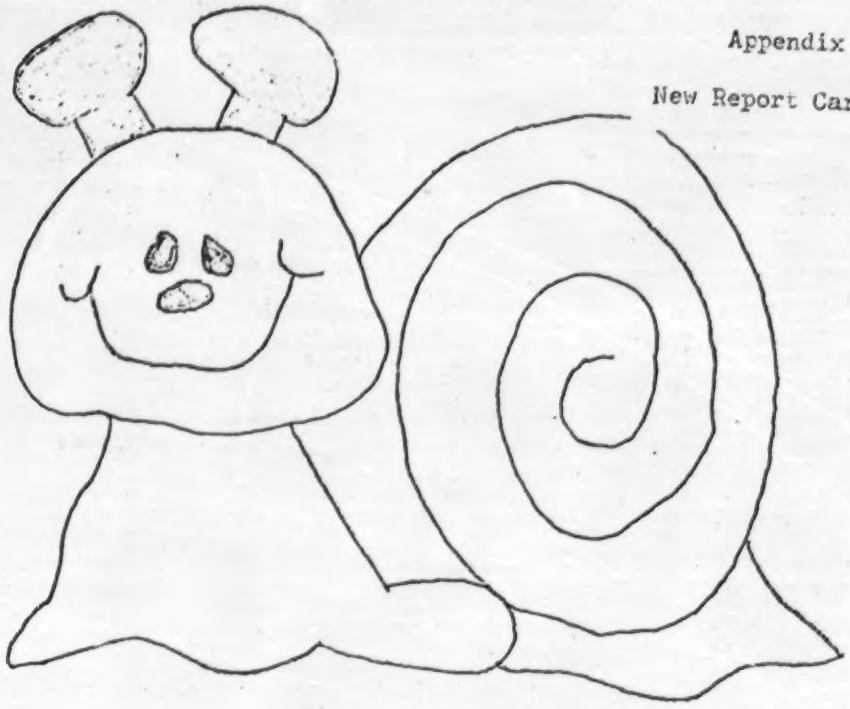
THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS ARE INTENDED TO GIVE INSIGHT INTO YOUR CHILDS CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE. THEY MAY BE USEFUL IN HELPING YOUR CHILD AT HOME. (LANGUAGE ARTS INCLUDES READING, SPELLING, LANGUAGE, AND WRITING SUBJECTS.)

LANGUAGE ARTS *PUPIL IS MAKING SATISFACTORY PROGRESS WITH
HOLDING AND USING PENCIL AND CRAYONS PROPERLY
EXHIBITING FINE MUSCLE CONTROL
RECOGNIZING HIS NAME
IDENTIFYING EVERYDAY SOUNDS
IDENTIFYING BEGINNING SOUNDS IN WORDS
RECOGNIZING COLORS
RECOGNIZING LIKENESSES AND DIFFERENCES IN LETTERS
RECOGNIZING THE FOLLOWING CAPITAL LETTERS OF ALPHABET A-Z
RECOGNIZING THE FOLLOWING SMALL LETTERS OF ALPHABET a-z
NAMING LETTERS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER
NAMING LETTERS IN RANDOM ORDER
SAYING SOUNDS OF LETTERS GIVEN IN ISOLATION
*PUPIL NEEDS TO MAKE FURTHER IMPROVEMENT IN
ANSWERING QUESTIONS AFTER LISTENING TO A STORY
RECOGNIZING LIKENESSES AND DIFFERENCES IN OBJECTS AND DESIGNS
*PUPIL NEEDS TO PRACTICE AT HOME ON
WRITING ON THE LINES
FORMING THESE LETTERS PROPERLY A-Z a-z
IDENTIFYING ENDING SOUNDS IN WORDS
*PUPIL IS SHOWING IMPROVEMENT WITH
WRITING NAME IN MANUSCRIPT
MATH *PUPIL IS MAKING SATISFACTORY PROGRESS WITH
UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF A SET
GROUPING OBJ ACCORDING TO A COMMON CHARACTERISTIC (E.G., SHAPE, SIZE, COLOR
COUNTING TO 20 BY ones
READING AND WRITING NUMERALS CORRECTLY TO 12
RECOGNIZING SIMPLE PLANE SHAPES LIKE 
*PUPIL NEEDS TO MAKE FURTHER IMPROVEMENT IN
UNDERSTANDING ORDINAL NUMBERS, FIRST THROUGH twelfth
*PUPIL NEEDS TO PRACTICE AT HOME ON
UNDERSTANDING MONEY IN BASIC DENOMINATIONS
SOCIAL STUDIES *PUPIL NEEDS TO PRACTICE AT HOME ON
PERFORMING THE FOLLOWING SKILL(S) knowing phone number
KNOWING WHERE HE LIVES
HEALTH *PUPIL IS MAKING SATISFACTORY PROGRESS WITH
KNOWING NAMES ~~& FUNCTIONS~~ OF VARIOUS BODY PARTS (NAMES OF BODY PARTS)
PHY EDU *PUPIL IS MAKING SATISFACTORY PROGRESS WITH
SHOWING COORD. IN BODY MOVEMENT ACT. SUCH AS (SKIPPING, TUMBLING, ETC)
SHOWING BODY CO-ORDINATION, USING (BALL, JUMP ROPE, BAL. BEAM, ETC)
SOCIAL GROWTH *PUPIL NEEDS TO MAKE FURTHER IMPROVEMENT IN
PAYING ATTENTION

BLENNERHASSETT KINDERGARTEN PROGRESS REPORT

Appendix 4

New Report Card Design



Dear Parents,

A report card is only one method of communication between home and school. This report has been issued to inform you of your child's progress so that you can help him at home. If you have any questions or comments about the information enclosed within, please feel free to write in the "Comments from Parents" section on the back or to contact your child's teacher to arrange a conference. Please keep this report for your reference.

ATTENDANCE RECORD	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total
Days Present					
Excused Absences					
Unexcused Absences					
Times Tardy					

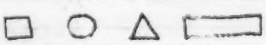
Marking Explanation

M = Child has mastered this skill
P = Child is making satisfactory progress in this area
N = Child needs to make further improvement in this area; practice at home would help
NY = Skill has not yet been taught

Comments from teacher if necessary:

Comments from parents if necessary:

KINDERGARTEN BASIC

	Oct.	Dec.	Feb.	Apr.	Jun.
SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT					
Appears to feel secure and happy in school					
Participates willingly in activities					
Gets along well with classmates					
Follows class and school rules					
Meets new situations with confidence					
Accepts responsibility					
Respects authority					
Respects rights of others					
Demonstrates good self-control					
Has good attitude toward self, others, & learning					
WORK HABITS					
Tries to do his best					
Pays attention					
Follows directions					
Works well independently					
Works well in a group					
Works quietly and politely without disturbing others					
Asks necessary questions about his work					
Begins and completes work on time					
Works accurately and neatly					
Uses materials and equipment wisely					
Makes good use of his time					
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT					
Gross Motor:					
Walks, runs, marches, jumps, gallops					
Hops on one foot					
Skips					
Walks balance beam					
Handles a ball easily					
Understands movement concepts (right, left, up, down, etc.)					
Identifies and names body parts					
Fine Motor:					
Holds and uses crayons and pencils accurately					
Uses scissors correctly					
Laces and ties shoes					
Manages own clothes fasteners (buttons, zips, snaps, etc.)					
Has established handedness (right or left)					
ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT					
MATH:					
Names basic shapes()					
Classifies/compares objects by shape, size, color					
Understands one to one correspondence					
Identifies sets having more and less					
Understands concepts of size and weight					
Counts to 20					
Names numerals 1 to 12 out of order					
Names correct number of objects in a set					
Identifies ordinal numbers first to twelfth					
Identifies a sequence of patterns					

SKILLS CHECKLIST

	Oct.	Dec.	Feb.	Apr.	June
MATH, continued					
Names the number before and after a given number					
Recognizes coin denominations					
Begins adding by joining sets to find sum					
Begins subtracting by separating objects					
LANGUAGE ARTS:					
Listening:					
Listens attentively when others are speaking					
Listens to and follows directions					
Identifies everyday sounds					
Recognizes differences in sounds					
Listens for specific information and answers questions					
Speaking:					
Articulates plainly					
Expresses ideas clearly					
Uses vocabulary appropriate for age and situation					
Speaks in complete sentences					
Handwriting:					
Traces and copies designs and letters					
Writes the basic strokes (| — \ / O)					
Prints full name					
Prints capital and small letters introduced					
Prints numbers introduced					
Writes on the lines					
Reading Readiness:					
Names basic colors					
Distinguishes likenesses and differences					
Verbally states full name					
Recognizes his name in print					
Reads pictures/words in left to right order					
Relates stories in sequence					
Recognizes capital letters					
Recognizes small letters					
Names capital letters in random order					
Names small letters in random order					
Identifies beginning sounds in words					
Identifies middle sounds in words					
Identifies ending sounds in words					
Names words that begin with certain letters					
Says sounds of letters in isolation					
Names pictures associated with sounds					
Blends sounds to make words					
Verbally states phone number					
Verbally states address					
States days of the week					
States months of the year					
Reads simple words					
Identifies rhyming words					
Identifies opposites					
Arranges a group of scrambled pictures in a sequence					
Knows alphabet sequence					